

1942

Early Chronology - Extension Farm Labor Program*

May 19--Director M. L. Wilson attended dinner meeting in New York City arranged by Dorothy Thompson to raise funds to finance Volunteer Land Corps experiment in placing 626 city boys and girls to work on farms in Vermont and New Hampshire during summer of 1942.

Oct. 14--Dorothy Thompson presented Volunteer Land Corps plan to Secretary Wickard and group of high ranking Department officials. Secretary appointed a committee to make recommendations:--M. L. Wilson, Extension Service, chairman; James S. Heizer, FSA; P. A. Thompson, FS; and J. W. Coddington, ACAA.

Oct. 22--Director Wilson addressed a letter to State Directors of Extension, commenting favorably on Dorothy Thompson's suggestion that the Agricultural Extension be the agency to mobilize youth for farms. Carried in newspapers of Oct. 19, 1942.

Oct. 28-30--Dorothy Thompson presented V.L.C. plan to meeting of Extension Directors held in advance of Land Grant College Association convention, Drake Hotel, Chicago. The report of committee on Extension Organization and Policy at that convention included the following as No. 1 in the list of actions taken. "A. Urban Youth and Women as Farm Labor. It was voted that the use of urban labor on farms in 1943 should be encouraged by the Extension Service in all appropriate ways.

Recommendations

"In view of the facts; (1) That there is a severe farm labor shortage; (2) That there is available a large potential supply of farm labor in the youth and women of urban areas; (3) That the experiment carried out during the past year in the use of urban youth and women for farm labor and experiences elsewhere demonstrate the value of this labor in helping alleviate the farm labor shortage and at the same time give to youth an experience valuable in the development of their lives; (4) That the Extension Service has been suggested as the agency which can most effectively assist in the placement and supervise the use of this labor among farm people; (5) That funds will be needed for this purpose.

"We therefore recommend to the Executive Committee that favorable consideration be given this matter and that the Committee on Extension Organization and Policy be authorized to take such action in cooperation with other interested parties as may be necessary to insure the success of the program."

Nov. 5--Lyle F. Watts named assistant to the Secretary "To Effectuate the Farm Labor Program of the Department."

Nov. 11--Secretary's Committee Dealing with Plans for City Youth to Work on Farms and the Application of the Experience of the Volunteer Land Corps on a Nationwide Basis, headed by Director M. L. Wilson, recommended to Secretary Wickard and Lyle Watts, assistant to the Secretary, farm labor problems, "that, as far as possible, the plans developed by the Volunteer Land Corps be adapted to a nationwide city youth organization for contributing to the war effort through work on farms."

Tentative, prepared for distribution annual conference Federal Extension Service, January 3, 1946. Meredith C. Wilson, Deputy Director, Extension Farm Labor Program

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The committee envisioned the plan as involving 3 functions.. (1) Recruitment within the city. (2) Placement. (3) Supervision.

At the national level the plan was to be headed by a "small coordinating and operating committee, composed of representatives from Extension Service, the Office of Education, and the Employment Service: staff of 15 persons to handle project from a national standpoint."

In the State, the project was to be operated by an administrative committee composed of the Director of the Extension Service, Director of the Employment Service, and a representative of the Department of Education. An advisory committee would meet twice a year.

The committee estimated that more than 100 youth recruits would be placed in each of 1000 counties. A county Volunteer Land Corps youth adviser would give personal supervision and direction to the activity.

Section II of the appendix to the committee's report made reference to a Women's Land Army, but the committee had "no specific recommendations to make in connection with the Women's Land Army at this time."

Nov. --The speaker's first definite connection with the proposed nationwide Volunteer Land Corps was a request received from Director Wilson by phone late one evening to prepare a budget estimate for presentation the following noon to Lyle Watts, who was handling farm labor problems in the Secretary's office.

Later, at the request of the Secretary's office, the budget was amended to include funds for a Women's Land Army program.

Nov. & Dec. --One step led to another and the speaker soon was involved in a series of conferences of Department of Agriculture, Office of Education and War Manpower Commission representatives to develop a single cooperative Volunteer Land Corps program. This was not easy of accomplishment, since both the Office of Education and the Employment Service of the War Manpower Commission had each made considerable headway in outlining its own plan to make youth available for agricultural work, and neither agency was at all enthusiastic about the Department of Agriculture's moving in to the center of the stage.

Dec. --With the establishment of the new Food Production Administration headed by Herbert W. Parisius, the farm labor functions performed by Lyle F. Watts were transferred to Major J. O. Walker, Assistant Administrator, Farm Security Administration.

Dec. 28. Director M. L. Wilson named the following committee "to study and make recommendations regarding the possibility of utilizing increasing numbers of non-farm women for appropriate kinds of farm work": Mary A. Rokahr, chairman, Grace E. Frysinger, Florence L. Hall. This committee was directed to "cooperate closely with Meredith C. Wilson, who is developing plans for carrying out those phases of the Department's 1943 farm labor program, which have been assigned to the Extension Service by the new Food Production Administration".

1943

January 6-7. The speaker reported to the committee on Extension Organization and Policy the progress made to date in developing plans for a nationwide "Victory Farm Volunteers" program, involving the three agencies, Extension Service, Office of Education, and U. S. Employment Service. At that time the plan had been concurred in by the Extension Service and the Office of Education, but was held up in the WMC. The War Manpower Commission representative never did get the plan cleared with that agency.

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee on Organization and Policy contain the following record of action taken: "The following resolution was moved by Director Davis, seconded by Director Burch, and voted:

"Whereas the lack of enough labor on farms is becoming acute to the extent of threatening production of adequate food; and whereas urban youth appears to be the biggest unused supply of labor: and whereas farm work in certain areas is already in progress on production this year.

"Be it resolved that we ask Director M. L. Wilson to insist upon the proper officials that they hasten action upon a feasible plan for federal assistance in selecting, training, and placing available urban youth in needed work on farms in 1943."

January 8-9. Director M. L. Wilson called a meeting at Hotel Barbizon-Plaza, New York City, of representatives of national farm and women's organizations and others to discuss desirability of some kind of nationwide women's land army, and to outline some basic principles to guide the development of such a program. The results of that meeting were presented to Secretary Wickard through Maj. J. O. Walker, Assistant Administrator, Farm Security Administration, in a memorandum dated January 12, 1943. An Extension Service committee composed of Mary A. Rokahr, chairman, Grace E. Frysinger, Florence L. Hall, and Meredith C. Wilson began outlining detailed plans for the organization and operation of a program to use large numbers of non-farm women to perform wartime work in farm food production.

January 19-21. It was on the last day of the 1943 annual Extension conference that word was received from Maj. John O. Walker that "something big" in the way of farm labor responsibilities was about to land in the lap of the Extension Service. The idea of transferring to the Cooperative Extension Service the agricultural labor functions of the U. S. Employment Service came as a complete surprise to Director M. L. Wilson. With meager information regarding the pending transfer and with absolutely no guiding instruction, the staff of the Division of Field Studies and Training, with Mr. Conway's assistance, prepared budget estimates over the weekend for transmittal to the Budget and Finance Office of the Department the following Monday noon.

January 22. Maj. J. O. Walker named Chief, Agricultural Labor Branch, by M. Clifford Townsend, Director of Food Production.

January 25. Chairman Paul V. McNutt, of the War Manpower Commission, issued famous Directive No. XVII, transferring to the Department of Agriculture "responsibilities in connection with the mobilization of farm labor - - - e, in order that agricultural production schedules might be met." There was much speculation at the time as to why this transfer of functions was made. From later developments, it became apparent that the Bureau of the Budget was largely responsible for getting the Cooperative Extension Service so completely into farm labor as a war emergency assignment.

January 28-29. Conference of representatives of Extension Service in 11 North Central States held at Chicago "to pool their thinking on farm labor problems, to appraise recent developments, to discuss the operation of non-farm youth program now well crystallized and to formulate a tentative program encompassing all Extension Service activities in the farm labor field." An important feature of that conference was the demonstration of J.I.T. put on by L. J. Fletcher and A. W. Turner of A.S.A.E.

January 29-30. Extension War Advisory Committee met with Director M. L. Wilson to consider the farm labor assignment. The memorandum of January 30, addressed to Secretary Wickard and signed by 12 State directors of Extension:--F. A. Anderson, Colorado; H. P. Rusk, Illinois; L. R. Simons, New York; J. E. Carrigan, Vermont; J. R. Hutcheson, Virginia; Paul E. Miller, Minnesota; Laurence A. Bevan, New Jersey; T. B. Symons, Maryland; D. W. Watkins, South Carolina; Geo. L. Schuster, Delaware; H. H. Williamson, Texas; and H. C. Ramsower, Ohio, said in part:

"You have asked us to undertake this work. We are deeply sensible of the trust implied in this assignment. The Extension Service has never refused a request for national service. It accepts this. It does so fully conscious, not only of the confidence implied in the assignment, but almost appalled at the stern implications implied. The situation is desperate. Labor is, of course, the indispensable key to crop and livestock production.

"We have accepted the job. We are returning to our States. Operations on this project will start on the morrow. We are relying on you to furnish the tools. We will do the work. It is a privilege to work with you in this field of service to our country and our farmers, but you must hold up our hands. We are confident that once those in authority know how truly desperate the situation really is, that we will not be denied the means with which to accomplish the necessary service."

February 1. Letter from Director M. L. Wilson to all State Directors informing them of the action of the Extension War Advisory Committee and calling two regional farm labor conferences.

February 4-5. Conference, Washington, D. C., of selected State Extension workers and representatives of Federal Extension Service. Six workshop groups made specific recommendations relative to the Emergency Farm Labor Program: administrative management; mobilization; training; Victory Farm Volunteers; Women's Land Army; campaigns.

February 12-13. Regional conference of Extension Directors and farm labor supervisors at Baltimore.

February 14-15. Similar regional conference at St. Louis.

March 1. Secretary Wickard announced formation of an Agricultural Labor Administration in the Department of Agriculture and the appointment of Wayne H. Darrow as Director. Fred Morrell, Mrs. Julian N. Friant, and Wm. L. Teutsch were named assistants to Darrow.

March - April. Much difference of opinion in Congress as to the wording of Farm Labor Appropriation Act.

March 25. President Roosevelt creates a War Food Administration in the Department of Agriculture and appoints Chester C. Davis, War Food Administrator.

April . Lt. Col. Jay L. Taylor named Deputy Food Administrator, In charge of Farm Labor.

April 21 - May 1. Series of regional conference on Extension Farm Labor held at New York, Chicago, Memphis, and Salt Lake City.

April 29. Public Law 45, 78th Congress, approved, appropriating \$26,100,000 for 1943 Farm Labor Supply Program.

June 21. Office of Labor was established by War Food Administrator Davis and Col. Philip G. Bruton named Director of Labor.

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